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To write or not to write? That is the question: Practice as research, Indigenous methodologies, conciliation and the hegemony of academic authorship

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Abstract

Academic authorship is an important way in which new knowledge about Indigenous Australian music and history is shared. Academic analyses, however, do not always successfully convey the emotive nature of this new historical knowledge. Publishing is also an exclusionary activity, relying on an author's academic training and familiarity with the protocols for publication. In this article I will suggest that instead we conceive of practice as research (PaR) in music as a method that is able to increase the participation of Indigenous people in the shaping of our communal understanding of Australian history. Performance as PaR allows more stories to be told by a diversity of people. In the hands of a good PaR researcher, performances are better able to communicate the emotive nature of colonial histories, broadening our understanding of Indigenous experiences of colonialism and how these impact on conciliation. Through documenting my work with Indigenous researcher and performer Jessie Lloyd I will argue that PaR is a method well suited to Indigenous contexts, reflecting Indigenous cultural practices using oral formats that rely on story, interpersonal relationships and participation.

Keywords Performance, Aboriginal, Australian, History, Authorship, Practice as Research

Introduction

This article explores the tension that exists between practice as research (PaR), the politics of academic authorship in the modern-day academy and how the act of writing about collaborative musical performances may or may not assist conciliation agendas in Indigenous Australian contexts. The content of this article reflects my musical and social experiences when co-presenting a workshop entitled '*Mission Songs Project: A musical conversation on building peace, empathy and conciliation through performance and applied research*' at the *Melbourne Collaboratory on Peace, Empathy and Conciliation through Music* in September 2017. The lead performer at the workshop was Jessie Lloyd, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musician whose research on the secular music of Australian Aboriginal missions has received critical acclaim internationally.

First, I will contextualize the research and performance setting by describing the Collaboratory environment and the workshop that I co-hosted with Jessie Lloyd. I will position myself in relation to the performance content, the Australian Indigenous context and will outline my working relationship with Jessie. Second, I explore the concept of PaR and its manifestation in ethnomusicology as a tool to champion conciliation and highlight social disparities. I ask whether PaR can be conceived of as an equitable and Indigenously appropriate way of creating, sharing and disseminating knowledge, sometimes complementing or even replacing academic writing. Through comparing Jessie Lloyd's *Mission Songs Project* with my own applied PaR project with the Hopevale Lutheran Aboriginal Community Choir I will illustrate how Indigenous research methodologies require that Indigenous musicians and researchers are not merely participants in a research project.

Indigenous people should actively set the research questions and methodologies, and determine the preferred modes of sharing any new knowledge created through PaR. I will query whether, through the act of academic writing, researchers like myself are negating the good they seek to do when attempting to act as (Indigenous) allies in the struggle to promote human equity. I will conclude with some personal experiential learnings I gathered through participating in the Collaboratory with Jessie. I will suggest that it is possible to find an acceptable, carefully negotiated middle-ground, provided that researchers remain mindful of how the academic practices of authorship, publishing and other forms of knowledge dissemination can still operate in ways that exclude the participation of Indigenous people, thereby hampering the road to conciliation. Like Treloyn and Googninda Charles (2014), I suggest that this may require researchers to accept that intercultural encounters may well include certain levels of discomfort during the processes of collaboration.

The Melbourne Collaboratory of 2017

I will first explore the context from which this publication has arisen to reflexively situate myself and the research described here. *The Melbourne Collaboratory on Peace, Empathy and Conciliation through Music* was hosted by the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, 21–22 September 2017, at the Centre for Theology and Ministry. At this Collaboratory I helped deliver with Jessie Lloyd a workshop entitled: ‘*Mission Songs Project: A musical conversation on building peace, empathy and conciliation through performance and applied research*’. Jessie Lloyd is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vocalist, guitarist, bassist, composer, producer and ukulele player. She has been awarded two fellowships: the Creative fellowship, State Library of Victoria (2016) and a Folk fellowship, National Library Australia (2017) for her work on the *Mission Songs Project*.

I met Jessie through an academic colleague when she was researching music related to Palm Island for the *Mission Songs Project* several years ago. She made contact via Facebook to enquire whether I had any secular songs from Hopevale, Northern Queensland, where I had undertaken my doctoral research. Hopevale is a Lutheran community and former mission in Northern Queensland. Because my own research was on Christian musics, I did not have much to share by way of secular recordings or detail. What I was able to give her were Christian materials in Guugu Yimithirr, the local Hopevalian language, and some songs in an older, pre-contact musical style (shared with permission). As I discovered later, when we met again in 2016 after I had moved to Sydney, Jessie has links with the Hopevale community. Her elders were members of the Lutheran Hopevale community who were forcibly removed to Palm Island as a result of the Hopevale community's evacuation further south to a settlement called Woorabinda during the Second World War. This forced and extremely traumatic evacuation separated families and killed nearly a quarter of the population due to influenza and other epidemics. I had always wanted to work with Jessie on a performance project, given some of the synergies between our work, and hoped that the Collaboratory would be something she might agree to help host with me. I saw it as an opportunity for us to both tell our stories whilst getting to know each other and sharing our knowledge about contemporary Indigenous performance practices and musical diversity. Happily, Jessie agreed. We worked on the abstract and ideas together and in preparation for our workshop Jessie extended her hospitality to me so that we could run through some songs and discuss the running order before the event.

The workshop abstract that we submitted explained that we sought to present a collaborative, interactive initiative facilitated by Jessie and myself, a Dutch applied ethnomusicologist with degrees from UK universities, now living and working in Sydney. Jessie and I decided to teach workshop participants religious and secular songs from Australian Aboriginal missions

whilst discussing with them and each other how the collecting and performing of these songs influenced our perspectives on conciliation, empathy, collaborative research and performance.

Through musical practice, discussions and readings, we openly asked the more difficult questions such as: what role did missions play in preserving or ‘disappearing’ Indigenous (musical) cultures? How did new (musical) cultures and identities develop on mission stations and how are they ‘valued’ today as hubs of Indigenous cultural practice? What hardships were experienced by Indigenous people living on missions and how are Indigenous resilience, emotion, humour and history captured in songs reflecting mission lives? Have mission histories been documented sufficiently and by whom? What roles do ‘white fella’ researchers like me and Indigenous performers like Jessie play in informing conciliation agendas and creating empathy? Can we consider talking, musical practice research, workshops and performance to be an Indigenous methodology of teaching history through music and emotion? How do workshops such as these contribute to opening up applied, reflexive conversations about Australian mission history? Does music have a special role to play in helping to address these difficult and sensitive issues?

The workshop was well attended, counting around fifteen participants. I started the workshop through a performative reading from my own Ph.D. work (2009), which explored my experiences of singing and conducting at a correctional facility in Mareeba, Northern Queensland, whilst on tour with the Hopevale Community choir. My applied, PaR work with the community choir (cf. Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2009, 2010, 2011) is what led Jessie to contact me. I spoke about my emotional responses to this event and how I had tried to capture this through a performative, story-telling mode of writing, different to standard academic prose, because I felt that academic prose was unable to capture the experiential and emotive nature of the event. After my academically framed introduction, I taught the audience a

Christian song in the local Hopevalian language Guugu Yimithirr ‘Ngani manaa’ (‘Have Thine Own Way’). Jessie then followed this up with material on the *Mission Songs Project*, teaching the audience the song ‘The Irex’ and several others. The audience was made up of academics, musicians and those who are both researchers and practitioners. All participated with enthusiasm and confidence in the singing, following Jessie’s lead in adding improvised harmonies. The subsequent question and answer session was also very lively, and we were able to address all questions raised in the abstract to a greater or lesser extent during the course of the workshop.

Although this article is derived from our joint experiences at the Collaboratory, it is mainly written and structured by me. Jessie contributed significantly to its inception through our work at the Collaboratory and in this respect is a co-author, much as in the sciences, where all participating parties contributing to the formation of new knowledge are accredited with authorship and multi-authored articles are far more common. Initially, we discussed the possibility of more active co-authorship, having agreed on a conversational format for the article that I would have furnished with the academic theoretical frameworks required to publish in an academic journal. Jessie’s perspectives on these frameworks would have been incorporated into the article’s presentation of the academic theories. Unfortunately, due to Jessie’s performance schedule and the arrival of her first child, our diaries did not align with the publication time frame. Consequently, I determined the content and structure of what is written here.

The act of writing about our collaborative process feels somewhat alien and ethically inappropriate when drawing on works such as Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), which argue that Indigenous researchers should tell their own stories in ways that are culturally appropriate, at times eschewing writing and preferring oracy. I do not feel that I am able to capture Jessie’s experiences without her first

confirming that what I write also reflects her understanding. My lingering discomfort with writing about other people's experiences, and in some cases my own discipline's attempts at doing so, is expertly captured by Pirsig in his work *Lila*:

This Cartesian 'Me', this autonomous little homunculus who sits behind our eyeballs looking out through them in order to pass judgement on the affairs of the world is just completely ridiculous. This self-appointed little editor of reality is just an impossible fiction that collapses the moment one examines it. (1991: 154)

Scholars such as Hagedorn (2001) and Kisliuk (1998), however, have argued that something can be known of the performative experiences of others during co-created performances if researchers clearly indicate that what they are describing are their own experiences using autoethnography. Both Kisliuk and Hagedorn also employ creative writing styles to capture the emotive and experiential nature of musical performance. Where I have been able to discuss my interpretations of musical practice with participants and audiences, therefore, I will share these. I will bolster my arguments with literature from the by-and-large western academy of which I am a product. My membership of this group does not allow me special rights to knowledge, and neither does it mean that the knowledge I share here on paper is the only valid form of its dissemination. However, as I will show later, writing is also an appropriate method of articulating and digesting knowledge if a researcher or a practitioner comes from a culture in which writing is the dominant mode of knowledge production.

Nelson (2013) argues that much knowledge is embedded in musical and other forms of artistic practice that are not captured in writing. This does not mean that this knowledge

does not exist. The knowledge might be embodied, inscribed in the body due to professional, specialist training. It is often experiential and learnt through doing. Writing about artistic practice in an academic journal merely affords opportunities to make visible new knowledge or existing practice-based knowledge in a specific, culturally determined way, namely through writing. For some (not including myself), it also validates or makes real the new knowledge acquired, even if this knowledge was already available in other artistic formats made visible through PaR, non-written outputs. Writing it down as I do now allows me to process new knowledge and share it with others who may also use writing and reading as their accepted or preferred mode of knowledge transmission. This article is also a means by which I fulfil my role as a scholar and how my community ‘measures’ my ability to do so.

PaR, ethnomusicology and conciliation

I will now explore what PaR is and how it has been embedded in ethnomusicological research for decades. Then I shall give some examples of how it has been used in the Australian context outside my own work. This will then be followed by a closer examination of Jessie Lloyd’s *Mission Songs Project* and my own work with the Lutheran Aboriginal community of Hopevale, where I worked as a choir facilitator for one year. I investigate whether PaR is a methodology uniquely suited to broadening our understanding of Indigenous experiences of colonization. I will suggest that PaR is capable of facilitating a wider participation of voices that help shape our understanding of Australian histories through performance, positively influencing conciliation processes.

Central to Nelson’s notion of PaR is the concept of ‘praxis’: ‘the possibility of thought within both “theory” and “practice” in an iterative process of “doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing”’ (2013: 32). Nelson prefers this term to others such as ‘practice-led research’ (a popular term in Australia) because, as Nelson argues, the term ‘practice-led’ suggests that

‘knowledge follows after, is secondary to, the practice’ (2013: 10) as opposed to it being a more reflexive, iterative process. Another term often used is ‘practice-based’ research. This term Nelson reserves ‘for research which draws from, or is about, practice but which is articulated in traditional word-based forms (books or articles)’ (2013: 10). I find Nelson’s distinctions helpful and will use them here. Practice-led and practice-based research and PaR are used in modern-day ethnomusicology, sometimes at different points in the same project, for different reasons, given the field’s multimodal approaches to studying music.

PaR has been embedded within the ethnomusicological method for many decades. Mantle Hood was the first researcher to develop a performative, embodied approach to ways of knowing in a formal educational setting. He believed that, ‘the training of ears, eyes, hands and voice and fluency gained in these skills assure a real comprehension of theoretical studies’ (Hood in Shelemay 1996: 37). Although the concept of bimusicality was first theorized by Hood in 1960, Shelemay (1996) points out that well before the concept became established, ethnomusicologists had actively participated in the transmission and perpetuation of musical traditions through performance. For example, John Lomax’s studies of cowboy songs and frontier ballads actively fed song lore back into the stream of oral tradition (Shelemay 1996: 48).

Much of the current ethnomusicological research on Australian Indigenous music is based on PaR, reciprocal and applied in nature (cf. Barney 2014; Campbell and Kilapayu Puruntatamen 2014; Ford et al. 2014). This is in keeping with The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, which assert that, ‘Research in Indigenous studies should benefit Indigenous peoples at a local level, and more generally’ (2012: 15). It also reflects anthropology’s (ethnomusicology’s methodological sister-discipline) critical turn of the

1980s that caused many researchers to examine the role that scholarship has played in maintaining hegemonic regimes and revise their scholarly practices in response.

Australian researchers co-author outputs with their Indigenous research colleagues and present at conferences together (Campbell and Kilapayu Puruntatamen 2014; Ford et al. 2014). Many projects include the repatriation of older archival materials to communities and involve the community in setting research questions, designing the methodologies and agreeing on the appropriate mechanisms for dissemination (cf. Treloyn and Googninda Charles 2014). Colleagues working in Indigenous Australian contexts specifically develop long-term, reciprocal relationships with communities to ensure that continued reciprocity, trust and sustainability can flourish and will outlast the short-term funding available via external grants. Through academic practice, researchers have also become advocates for Indigenous rights to culture, eschewing politically neutral approaches to research on ethical grounds and championing Indigenous approaches to research and publication (cf. Corn 2010). This development reflects Nelson's optimism. Referencing Haseman (2007), Nelson writes:

that a PaR methodology not only enhances the academy but also has particular relevance to a widespread political concern on the part of governments for research to be [...] of social benefit. While some aspects of the 'impact'¹ agenda seem contrived, PaR, if fully understood and embraced, might genuinely 'have applications far beyond the creative arts, design and creative disciplines. For performative research is aligned with the processes of testing and prototyping so common in user-led and end-user research'. (2013: 21–22)

It is also important to acknowledge that research projects conducted by Indigenous researchers in their own or other Indigenous communities will have political implications alongside those of governmental impact agendas and academic advocacy activity. Projects may or may not be supported, for a variety of reasons, by other Indigenous people, thereby influencing levels of empathy and conciliation. There is no guarantee that research will automatically succeed in promoting a better understanding of Indigenous histories by virtue of using Indigenously appropriate methodologies. However, this does not mean that Indigenous researchers should not engage in research or set their own agendas and decide which methods work best for them.

Although the decolonization of all knowledge production processes is unlikely to occur overnight and may never be complete, this should not stop us from trying to move in that direction as an ideal state. This process of working towards better and more ethical methods, which involve Indigenous researchers setting their own agendas, may help avoid circumstances such as the one caused by Walker in 2018, when he published erroneous information about Indigenous women singers because he failed to consult them about the book's content before its publication.

Can PaR be an Indigenous research method?

I will now explore whether PaR is one way in which ethnomusicologists and other music scholars and practitioners might be able to facilitate conciliation, generating the social benefit of which Nelson speaks. By comparing the methodologies underpinning Jessie's *Mission Songs Project* to my own applied PaR work with the Australian Aboriginal Hopevale community choir, I will illustrate that decolonization and conciliation through the use of Indigenous-led methodologies requires that Indigenous people must be involved in setting the research questions whilst benefiting from the research outcomes.

Indigenous Maori scholar Tuhiwai Smith (2012: 175–76) offers several questions that researchers may wish to consider when engaging with Indigenous research methodologies to ensure that they benefit Indigenous participants:

1. Who defined the research problem?
2. For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
3. What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
4. What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
5. What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
6. What are some possible negative outcomes?
7. How can the negative outcomes be eliminated?
8. To whom is the researcher accountable?
9. What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher?

Tuhiwai Smith also notes that Indigenous approaches to research rely heavily on ‘oracy, debate, formal speech making, structured silences and new conventions which shape oral traditions’, which she argues are critical to ‘developing trust, sharing information, strategies, advice, contacts and ideas’ (2012: 15). Many of these oral approaches to knowledge creation and sharing in Indigenous Australian non-academic contexts include artistic practices such as song cycles, dance and art forms. These are oral, visual, embodied practices and are seminal in generating and validating new and existing knowledge, resonating with Nelson’s conceptualization of PaR. He reflects on the ways in which many performative arts practitioners see their creative practice, which often includes oral, visual and physical formats such as music, film and dance, as a way of sharing knowledge. Performative arts and knowledge created through these media provide numerous instabilities, however, which ‘pose

particular challenges to ideas of fixed, measurable and recordable “knowledge”, and its modes of production’ (2013: 4). Citing Leonard and Sensiper (1998: 113), Nelson states:

Knowledge exists on a spectrum. At one extreme, it is almost completely tacit, that is semi-conscious and unconscious knowledge held in people’s heads and bodies. At the other end of the spectrum, knowledge is almost completely explicit or codified, structured and accessible to people other than individuals originating it. Most knowledge of course exists between extremes. (2013: 38)

Since knowledge as a noun suggests that it is out there simply awaiting capture in a concrete and pure form, Nelson proposes instead that we use the verb ‘knowing’. This verb more accurately reflects that not all knowledge is easily captured or conveyed in ways that are readily understood or universally experienced. This is what makes achieving conciliation through musicking unpredictable at times. The interpretive possibilities are numerous. It is not possible to entirely pre-empt responses to musical materials and sometimes performances can be emotionally challenging or even confrontational. Through good facilitators and respectful performance practice, however, it is possible to use music, text and context as a tool to developing a better understanding of Indigenous mission histories, enhancing empathy.

Jessie Lloyd’s *Mission Songs Project*

Jessie Lloyd’s *Mission Songs Project* is an excellent example of research that employs PaR, Indigenous methodologies, where the knowledge gained is valuable to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. Jessie, through her research and performance, uncovered the hidden

song tradition of mission stations and reservations. Eminent researcher and Aboriginal elder Professor Marcia Langton, in the project's introductory YouTube clip, states:

So I think it's tremendously important that we capture this modern song history, because it's part of our history, it's part of our tradition, it's part of our people - changed their culture and adapt to the times, keep the memories [...] Not many people are recording these traditions. There are very few people recording these traditions. They are not part of the standard ethnomusicological practice, except for say, Aaron Corn's work with *Yothu Yindi* (Corn 2009), but otherwise 'no' we haven't captured those historical songs. (Lloyd 2014a)

Importantly, Jessie's project was supported by many named Indigenous elders and musical performers (Lloyd 2014b). This is in keeping with the Indigenous cultural protocol of naming people, places and geographical elements of significance and respecting elders as important custodians of culture and knowledge.

Jessie chose her own area of research interest when she became curious about the songs from Aboriginal reserves and the mission days when she heard her aunties singing an old tune from Palm Island, Queensland, Australia, called 'The Irex'. *The Irex* was the name of the boat transporting Stolen Generation children² and those removed under the Aborigines Protection Act to Palm Island throughout the early- and mid-twentieth century. This song was sung by families not knowing if they would ever see their loved ones again.

The *Mission Songs Project* included methodological approaches that are standard academic practice. Jessie's primary approach to researching and reviving the old mission songs was through performance and consultation with senior Indigenous songmen and songwomen

(ethnography and participant observation). Jessie travelled Australia, visiting various communities and listening to their stories and music about life during the old mission days. Her State Library of Victoria Creative Fellowship Award (2016) and the National Library of Australia Folk Fellowship Award (2017) allowed her valuable access to resources and oral histories, discovering hidden gems in the archives (archival research).

Much like John Lomax's work on cowboy songs, Jessie's uncovered musical repertoire is designed to be re-introduced into modern-day musical practice and vocabulary. Songs can be performed and listened to by general audiences: Jessie taught and performed songs from her album during the Collaboratory in Melbourne, for example. As part of the project outcomes she created the CD *The Songs Back Home: Mission Songs Project* (2017). The CD contains song lyrics with guitar chords to facilitate performance. When Jessie performs the songs in public with her ensemble, she will also narrate the story behind the song, where it was uncovered and the historical associations that it has. During performances and our Melbourne workshop Jessie actively encouraged audience participation in the song renditions. With every performance or listening a new dialectical relationship is formed with an audience, affording new opportunities for knowledge, history and experiences to be created by performers, listeners and/or workshop participants.

Jessie's PaR approach to exploring and reviving contemporary musical repertoire might be conceived of as an Indigenous approach to research. In some contexts, Jessie may also have considered herself to be an 'insider' to the musical context, when for example working with songs performed by family members and loved ones. It was Jessie and other community elders across Australia who investigated the music and determined which examples could be used for recording and performance purposes. Jessie's personal curiosity about Indigenous contemporary histories, and specific song and musical practices on Indigenous missions and reservations, led to her successful applications for fellowships. Her background and skills as

a performer allowed her to acquire musical repertoire with ease, working by ear and learning through performing. Having involved community elders and advisors, Jessie approached the research questions through a combination of oracy, literary and archival research. Her sharing of this new knowledge is also oral and experiential, taking the form of performances, audience participation and the project CD, and radio interviews and YouTube videos.

The academic knowledge gained is a broadening out of Indigenous musical histories and an acknowledgement that Indigenous diversity, histories and modernity are embedded in and shaped by contemporary musical formats. This new knowledge complements research focussing on older musical styles that might be described as more ‘traditional’³ or similar to pre-colonial musical genres. As Langton points out, research about more contemporary musical styles is currently uncommon. Apart from Corn’s work on Yothu Yindi (2009), few scholars have thoroughly examined the contemporary music styles that are popular with Indigenous performers and listeners, such as country gospel, country and western, hip hop, reggae and Christian musical styles. Some notable exceptions here include Breen (1989), Walker (2000), Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004), Magowan (1999, 2007), Bracknell (2017), Rademaker (2018) and my own work with the Lutheran Hopevale Community Choir of Northern Queensland (Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013). It is, I believe, of importance that work on more modern musical styles is undertaken more systematically.

My research on Australian Aboriginal choral Christian singing

My own research and performance context were very similar to those described in Naina Sen’s documentary film *Songkeepers* (2017). The documentary follows The Central Australian Aboriginal Women’s Choir, and their conductor Morris Stuart, as they toured Germany in 2015. Liner notes to the tour CD indicate that choral singing was introduced to Central Australia by Lutheran missionaries in the late 1800s. Hymnody was translated into

local languages and helped preserve these languages through song. Hymnody also contributed towards the propagation of literacy and enhanced connections to country, thereby consolidating identities. The multi-lingual, pre-dominantly female choir has collaborated with many other singing groups and artists including the Soweto Gospel Choir (The Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir 2015). They also performed at the Sydney Opera House and in the United States of America in 2018.

As a researcher I also worked on Lutheran Australian Aboriginal choral singing practices. Between July 2004 and June 2005, I undertook a PaR project in collaboration with the Lutheran Australian Aboriginal community of Hopevale, Northern Queensland, Australia. At the community's request I became the local choral facilitator or 'choir lady'. Although ironically the local Pastor had wanted the choir to be secular in nature, the community itself requested that it become a church-based Lutheran ensemble according to local traditions and history. Through conducting and singing with the choir (musical praxis) and combining my musical activities with participant observation, ethnography, interviewing, note making and audio and visual recordings and historical archival research, I answered my research question: 'Can choral singing have a positive impact on the construction of Indigenous identities?'. I formulated this specific research question after the Hopevale community had indicated they would like me to reinvigorate their local choral singing tradition. They determined that this would be the best reciprocal arrangement for allowing me to gain access to their community after I had sent them my CV, which detailed my practice-based experience alongside my academic credentials. I subsequently took a course in choral facilitation that complemented my own singing practitioner knowledge as a full member of one of London's prestigious choirs, the London Philharmonic Choir.

I spent one year with the community re-invigorating their choral singing tradition and extending their choral repertoire with contemporary ecumenical Christian hymnody and

songs, whilst being mindful of local aesthetic preferences and performance practice. This was a steep learning curve on my part: as an atheist, I was not particularly familiar with church repertoire or hymnody. I therefore had to learn many new materials, in four-part harmony, that I could teach the choir by rote, as none were readers of music. At all times I endeavoured to make choral practice and performance pleasurable for the singers and their audience, which meant constantly seeking feedback from singers and their audiences about their musical preferences, practice and the community's musical history. My work led to the choir being sponsored on a four-day tour by the Queensland Arts Council to visit a correctional facility and a rehabilitation centre and several tourist locations and Christian venues. The tour received Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio coverage and was well received by its various audiences in multiple locations: audience numbers were good and general feedback and interactions with the choir were positive. Concerts within Hopevale, Cooktown, and whilst on tour were well attended by both members of the local Hopevale community and external listeners. Interviews for the doctoral thesis and experiential details demonstrated that the overall effect of regular choral singing had the capacity to help raise self-esteem and community pride; increase musical skills; help promote an understanding of Indigenous Australian diversity and spirituality amongst a wider Australian and tourist public; and stimulate social engagement and interaction between singers and their audience whilst promoting well-being generally (Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2009, 2010).

The positive results were largely the result of the Hopevale Choir's willingness to support my work and their great enthusiasm for singing. The Hopevalian community benefitted from the PaR methods in the longer term as well. Following my departure, their new visibility meant that they received and accepted invitations to perform at the Queensland Music Festival to represent the traditional owners of the area. This provided the choir with opportunities to collaborate with Sydney-based conductors and composers that they very much enjoyed. In

addition, their involvement with the Festival provided them with a small amount of funding that they set aside in a bank account to be used for choir activities. The Hopevalian singers also joined local choir rehearsals with predominantly Anglo-Saxon choirs in the areas of Cooktown and Rossville for a while. Had there been time and funding support available I would have taken the choir to the Central desert and Germany as this is what they had expressed an interest in doing: going to Germany and Nuendettelsau, in particular, to sing with members of the branch of Lutheranism to which they belong. The choir had also wanted to experience fellowship with other Indigenous Lutherans. In that respect, they had very similar wishes to those later expressed by The Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir.

Currently the choir is less active. The youngest member of my ensemble in 2005 was 55 years of age. Many have since passed on or are physically unable to attend rehearsals regularly. Although Christian singing still occurs in the community, in church and in local homes, choral singing is a genre associated with the older generation. Newer genres such as country gospel, Hillsong church music and Christian reggae, and more secular song styles, appeal more to the younger generations.

Returning to Tuhiwai Smith's eight questions (2012: 175–76), if we consider musical performance, conversations and the consultation of elders to be Indigenously appropriate ways for conducting research, then I acted in ethically sound ways during my research project (Swijghuisen Reigersberg 2009). However, what I was unable to do for geographical reasons, and an absence of pre-existing contacts in the field, was to agree on my research question and foci with the Hopevale community before commencing my work. My research question; 'Can choral singing have a positive impact on the construction of Indigenous identities?' was determined by the methodology to be used as preferred by the Hopevalian community, but the question itself was my own. The community and choir therefore gained musical knowledge, well-being and visibility. Through interviewing and by explaining why I was

asking certain questions I gained insights into what knowledge mattered to the community, which had little to do with constructs of identity. What Hopevalians valued most during my PaR project were their opportunities to sing and enjoy fellowship with other Christians, friends and family. Once my Ph.D. thesis had been completed, my historical investigation and narratives of those choir members who had passed on became valued⁴, containing ‘stories about the old people’. The knowledge that was valuable to me academically was therefore not as valuable to Hopevalians. Thankfully this fact did not inflict harm, and my research yielded many other benefits, but for the work to have fully included Indigenous methodologies (as Jessie’s *Mission Songs Project* did), my research question should also have been shaped through dialogue. However, that I adjusted my methods according to local contexts, reflecting on my practice as I went along, constituted an iterative process along PaR lines.

Another way in which Jessie’s work differs from my own is that her dissemination strategies focus less on writing and more on performance. Because I was doing my research as part of a Ph.D. programme, I had to write a single-authored thesis for examination purposes. I complemented this with audio recordings and video materials that provided illustrative quotes from interviewees (with their permission) and visual practice samples of my choral facilitation style. Nelson (2013) advocates for writing, reading and theorizing to be complementary to PaR methods, given that writing and reading have a communicative role to play in situating research questions, methods and outcomes. They convey the intellectual lineage and background in which the research is embedded. Nelson argues that writing and reading of all kinds can help articulate and evidence a research enquiry, facilitating a dialogic engagement with performative traditions whilst assisting the sharing of knowledge where audiences are culturally or academically diverse. He holds that a Ph.D. candidate in PaR should possess knowledge of their field that is up to date since in the research context it is not possible to assert that new knowledge was created if a baseline for existing knowledge has

not been evidenced. I would also add that writing is an appropriate method of articulating and digesting knowledge if a researcher or a practitioner comes from a culture in which writing is the dominant mode of knowledge production. Nelson's point is entirely valid in the context of established western academic practices and especially those that are subject to research assessment and audit such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. It is precisely the overreliance on writing, however, that those hoping to decolonize the academy wish to challenge.

Writing, PaR and conciliation

While communities may want to work with a Maori researcher, they may be quite unaware of the risks that many academics face when researching in the margins. One example of this is the pressure from the academy to turn research into peer reviewed publications and expectations from communities that researchers should not be building their careers by researching 'them'. Increasingly, research is viewed as an activity that must be measured and assessed for quality as part of a researcher's performance, and an individual's performance is linked directly to a department's and institution's ranking. Researchers working for social justice are likely to be involved in hours of work that do not lead to a 'quality' academic publication – they may contribute to major social change, but their research ranking will not reflect their contribution to society. (Tuhiwai Smith 2012: 206)

The above quote, from Tuhiwai Smith's seminal *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012), directly captures some of the challenges that decolonization presents to standard western academic practices. This challenge is amplified when we

combine it with those who prefer to not share their PaR outputs in writing, worrying that it might 'extinguish the spark' and 'eliminate the valuable experience that is art or because they are precious about what they do' (Nelson 2013: 36).

Like Nelson I believe that writing in many cases can assist with the processes of articulating and evidencing the research enquiry. In addition, if the interpretation and experience of an artwork are person and context specific, then we must not assume that the research enquiry and its outcomes are transparently evident in the art form itself and acknowledge that interpretations may vary. Whilst this ambiguity might be a desirable or an intended outcome, the perceiver will not know this unless it is clarified to him or her in writing, as part of the process of evidencing research, which is required for a degree or peer review.

From an Indigenous perspective, writing and the creation of academic knowledge about Indigenous performance and history are more problematic for another reason relevant to conciliation. Tuhiwai Smith holds that imperialism is a 'discursive field of knowledge' (2012: 22), being more than a set of political, economic and military phenomena. Eurocentric definitions of historical progress include an increase in literacy and numeracy and therefore writing. However, early writings about Indigenous Australians by missionaries, government officials and anthropologists and other researchers painted an inaccurate and damaging picture of Indigenous society (cf. Nakata 2007). Such writing was often used to support paternalistic interventions, the negative consequences of which are still felt today. Because many Indigenous people have been denied access to their own languages and literacy, and because the written mode of communication is seen by western society as being a more acceptable and robust form of 'evidence' than an oral or a musical account, many Indigenous people have been unable to retell and share histories in ways that might challenge the dominant mode of history and knowledge-production. They are excluded from the process of 'writing back', unless they at some level adopt the standard academic writing practices as

accepted by the academy for promotion and other purposes. This in turn, as we have seen above, may disrupt the relationship between Indigenous researchers and their Indigenous collaborators, implicating the former in the problematic formation of colonial histories through writing. Therefore, Indigenous people may tread carefully and warily when authorship is mentioned, even if this might enhance conciliation processes.

Conclusion

Through working with the Hopevale Community Choir, developing the Collaboratory presentation with Jessie Lloyd and subsequently writing this article, I was reminded of the political nature of PaR in Indigenous contexts. These experiences raise how PaR and authorship can be used to promote an awareness of what Indigenous approaches to research may or may not entail and how these support or hinder conciliation. This article illustrates how Jessie's research included oracy, performance and a communal, organic and collaborative approach to setting and investigating questions about contemporary Indigenous music histories. Her methods contrast with my own, in that I was unable to agree in advance on the appropriate research questions to ask. Consequently, the performative and knowledge outcomes of my applied, PaR project were received and valued differently by myself and the Hopevalian community. Therefore, I argue, musical PaR can function as an Indigenous research methodology, but as with all research projects in Indigenous contexts, special attention needs to be paid to what knowledge is created, why, by what methods and how it is disseminated. Indigenous agency must be front and centre of any project.

The Collaboratory also allowed me to reflect on what it means to be an ally or advocate for Indigenous rights. Whilst I was keen to share my own research at the Collaboratory, I did not want to make Jessie, or the audience, feel that I was there just to promote my own work. I believed that our performative, collaborative and informal approach would facilitate this process, and it did. Jessie, being a much more engaging speaker and performer, received the

most questions and audience attention. I had to take a step back, not insist that my research receive more ‘air time’ and allow Jessie space and time to tell her own story. As someone coming from an academic culture that thrives on so-called expertise and economies of knowledge, this was a new learning: sometimes being an ally requires you do nothing at all. It may even result in you getting less of an opportunity to share your work, and that is as it should be.

At other times, being an ally may mean doing more than you expected. It might require you to accept that your genuine desire to decolonize the academy through co-authorship and open debate is a specific agenda informed and supported by modern theories and trends in the western academy. Indigenous researchers like Jessie may have other more pressing and valuable priorities, such as earning a living through performance or enjoying the arrival of their new-born. They might not have the time or inclination to dedicate themselves to writing in the same ways as a university-based researcher might.

This disinclination to write may, in some cases, be fuelled by a continued mistrust of the academic authorial enterprise. Academic authorship may be viewed as a white-dominated exercise designed to perpetuate the cultural hegemony of Indigenous misrepresentation, disallowing Indigenous people the opportunity to express themselves in ways that are more appropriate, whilst safeguarding academic promotions, degrees and similar. In my case being an ally meant understanding these perspectives and priorities, valuing them and taking on the writing of this article without attempting to represent and interpret Jessie’s experiences.

This continuous reflection on academic practice and desire not to behave inappropriately or give offense was taxing and emotional in that it required me to constantly question why I was even there, doing the research I love. Often researchers, myself included, are very close to their own work and come with the best of intentions. They may not understand that their

well-meaning interventions are at best not a priority or at their worst unhelpful and harmful. It is only through attempts at collaboration and through dialogue that these issues can be better understood, informing future conciliation processes. In this respect I at least felt that Jessie's and my own joint collaborative PaR approach was a success, as it taught me much about being an ally. This new knowledge I now share here in writing: a mode of communication with which I am familiar and comfortable. Lastly, my most valuable observation was that although the written *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* explicitly advocates that researchers 'recognise that Indigenous individuals or communities may have more pressing priorities, that may impinge on the research time frames' (2012: 4), I did not really appreciate what this meant in writing until I experienced it. This illuminates the fact that PaR facilitates experiential learning that writing may fail to capture. As such it is an invaluable tool for conciliation, which by and large rests on shared experience, histories and empathy.

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Notes

¹ In the United Kingdom, Australia and the European Union research funders and governments now ask that research projects demonstrate their non-academic impact and engagement, which goes beyond the academy. This impact is assumed to be positive and can include cultural and social well-being, economic benefit and policy outcomes, for example.

² Members of The Stolen Generation are people with an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage who were forcibly removed from their Indigenous families sanctioned by protectionist state or federal legislation in the early to mid-twentieth century.

³ I am fully aware that the word ‘traditional’ is problematic in that it has overtones of essentialism and often does not account for local or Indigenous definitions of what is ‘traditional’. For example, the Christian Aboriginal people I worked with in Hopevale designated their hymnody and choral singing practices as ‘traditional’. The term, however, can be useful when describing musical genres or knowledge that was present before colonizers arrived. I use the adjective traditional here in that sense, meaning it to describe music that was and is present before and despite colonization and missionization.

⁴ Due to their Christian beliefs Hopevalians place no restrictions on mentioning the names of recently deceased persons and have no restrictive cultural protocols surrounding the showing of images and sharing of sound recordings of deceased people. This contrasts with communities where it is not appropriate to name the deceased or show images for quite some time after their death.